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By Terry Lewis
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Agriculture water conservation funds released recently are part of an original five-year, \$10 million grant

ALBANY, GA — U.S. Rep Sanford Bishop, D-Albany, on Wednesday announced the release of \$70,000 in additional funding for the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) in the Lower Flint River Basin of southwest Georgia and results of the Flint River Basin Partnership.

The money is part of a five-year, \$10 million USDA-NRCS grant awarded last year to the Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District via AWEP.

The AWEP promotes ground and surface water conservation and improves water quality by helping farmers and ranchers implement agricultural water enhancement activities.

The funding is dedicated to two conservation practices — the low pressure drop nozzle retrofit with end-gun shutoff and irrigation water management.

“The partnerships you have here are incredible,” USDA-NRCS Chief David White said. “No longer is this an “us” versus “them” structure. It’s now an “us.” structure.

“The challenge before us now is that in the future, the United Nation says the world’s population will increase by more than a billion people. We’ll need a 70 to 75 percent increase in food production. Most of that food will come from the United States.

“That’s why we need to be more efficient with our resources — including water conservation.”

“It’s a very exciting time for us,” said Flint River Basin Partnership Executive Director David Reckford of happenings in the 27-county FRBP. “We are making great strides in innovative technology — especially in the area of Variable Rate Irrigation (VRI).”

The pilot VRI system allows for water to be applied only in areas that need irrigation while areas that are not cropped or could use a lower rate receive little or no water.

With funding from USDA-NRCS, the pilot project deployed 22 VRI systems, improving irrigation efficiency on more than 3,500 acres, and effectively introducing commercial VRI technology into the United States.